

Check against Delivery.



ICRC

AU-ICRC workshop to advance the implementation of victim assistance obligations arising from various weapons treaties.

Statement made by Mr Bruce Mokaya Orina, ICRC Head of Delegation to the African Union.

Addis Ababa, 04 March 2014

Distinguished representatives from the AU Member States, Excellencies Ambassadors and representatives from donor countries, Partner organisations, Observers and invited participants,

On behalf of the ICRC, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this workshop whose objective is to *“advance the implementation of victim assistance obligations arising from various weapons treaties”*.

The ICRC is honoured to be co-hosting this workshop with the African Union Commission, with whom we have been working closely for over 20 years. As a matter of fact, this is the 13th seminar that the ICRC is jointly -organizing with the AU on a theme of common interest.

Indeed exactly one year ago, we co-organised together with AU, a related workshop that addressed *“Key Challenges to Meeting Clearance Deadlines under the Mine Ban Convention and Convention on Cluster Munitions”*. The organization of this current workshop therefore, illustrates how the clearance of mines and the assistance to the victims are important for the African Union Commission and the ICRC.

I have no doubt that the three days that you dedicate to discussions will help to find ways to better assist the victims of landmines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war.

Distinguished participants,

Fifteen years after the entry into force of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, scores of individuals continue to be injured or killed by these weapons. While the number of new victims has dramatically decreased since the entry into force of the Convention, new victims continue to add to the total number of people for whom life-long assistance is usually required.

It is against this backdrop that the Mine Ban Convention set a precedent in incorporating a legal obligation on the part of state parties, to assist victims and survivors.

During the Nairobi Summit held in 2004, the States Parties agreed that “victim assistance” should include work in the areas of: data collection to understand the extent of the challenges faced; emergency and continuing medical care; physical rehabilitation; psychological support and social reintegration; economic reintegration; and, the establishment, enforcement and implementation of relevant laws and public policies.

Within the African continent, African States are trying to deal with the aftermath of armed conflicts in many ways. These often includes having to clear large quantities of anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions and other

unexploded ordinances, as well as meeting the needs of victims with weapons-related injuries, many of whom require life-long care. Affected families and communities may also often require support.

It is worth noting here that increasingly, a number of African countries affected by mines have improved access to necessary services for survivors, and the concept and the importance of Victim Assistance is gradually getting integrated into national programmes.

The ICRC, through its Physical Rehabilitation Support programmes that it provides in most affected countries, has witnessed an overall improvement in most of these countries in the delivery of assistance to victims. Not always at the same level, not always with the same success, but nevertheless, improvement is there. However, the ICRC is also aware that much remains to be done to ensure that services continue to be available in the long-term.

Dear participants, the ICRC and the AU, will continue to work together in promoting a comprehensive approach to Victim Assistance as we believe that there are significant potential synergies that could be harnessed in the implementation of victim assistance under different international instruments, both at the national and international level. The objective of promoting a comprehensive approach is to maximize the impact of victim assistance efforts beyond what can be achieved under each individual treaty obligations.

Looking at this year 2014, the ICRC, through its Physical Rehabilitation Programme and through its Special Fund for the Disabled, will provide physical rehabilitation assistance in 19 countries in Africa. This assistance will allow several thousands of survivors to regain mobility, which is an important step towards enjoying basic rights such as access to food, shelter and education, getting a job and, more generally, having the same opportunities as other members of society.

To conclude then dear participants, I would like once again to wish you fruitful discussions and hope that your discussions would help to advance victim assistance programmes in Africa as well as further the implementation of other legal obligations arising from the various international and regional instruments on weapons. The ICRC stands committed to this cause and will continue to make available its expertise and resources towards this goal.

I thank you